

Staff Memorandum



To	Mayor A. Nuttall, Deputy Mayor R. Thomson, and Members of Council
Subject	Elimination of Grass Cutting on Steep Slopes at City Facilities
Date	May 13, 2026
Ward	All
From	R. Pews, Director of Corporate Facilities
Executive Member Approval	J. Schmidt, General Manager of Community and Corporate Services
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform Members of Council that Corporate Facilities will no longer perform grass cutting on steep slopes at City facilities due to significant health and safety risks and equipment limitations. This operational change reduces risk to staff and is expected to contribute to long-term cost savings.

Background:

Corporate Facilities assumed responsibility for in-house lawn maintenance services in April 2024. At the start of the 2024 grass-cutting season, a near-miss incident occurred during maintenance on sloped terrain. This triggered a formal review in partnership with the Health and Safety Branch in the Human Resources Department.

Findings from this investigation showed:

- Several city facility properties – including the Surface Water Treatment Plant and Emergency Services Campus – contain berms and hills originally designed to be naturalized, not mechanically maintained.
- These slopes exceed the safe operating limits of current city lawn-care equipment, placing operators at high risk of injuries related to rollovers, falls, and loss of control.
- Contractors who previously maintained these areas either used specialized slope equipment or, more likely, operated unsafely beyond equipment design limits.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) prohibits the city from directing or allowing staff to perform work outside manufacturer-specified safe operating guidelines. Continuing such practices could expose the City to charge, injury claims, and liability, far exceeding the cost of alternate solutions.

Decision Rationale: Discontinuation of Steep Slope Cutting:

Following the 2024 – 2025 investigation, Corporate Facilities has determined that steep slopes cannot be maintained safely using the city's existing equipment or staffing model. Continuing to do so would:

- Contravene OHSA safety requirements.
- Put staff at foreseeable risk of serious injury.
- Create avoidable future WSIB and liability costs.
- Require remote-controlled equipment (e.g., Energreen Robo Mini) costing \$80,000 - \$100,00, with annual ownership costs of \$16,000 - \$18,500, if the city chose to continue servicing these slopes mechanically.

Given that in-house snow clearing and grass cutting were adopted to reduce contracted service costs, reinvesting in specialized slope-mowing equipment would undermine the cost-saving strategy.

Operational Change:

Effective 2026, Corporate Facilities will no longer perform grass cutting or trimming on steep slopes at any City facility. These areas will revert to naturalization, consistent with their original landscape design intent.

Budget Impact:

Discontinuing the mechanical maintenance of steep slopes will:

- Avoid capital acquisition costs for specialized slope-mowing equipment.
- Reduce risk of costly injury claims or OHSA enforcement actions.
- Support the broader cost-savings goals associated with the in-house grass-cutting service implementation.

Any naturalization efforts required will be funded within existing Facility Operations budgets.

Communication:

Staff will prepare communication materials as appropriate for internal teams and external stakeholders. This change is anticipated to be positively received from a safety and environmental standpoint.

Appendix:

Not Applicable

Memo Author:

Gus Diamantopoulos, Manager of Corporate Facility Services, Corporate

Facilities

File #:

Not Applicable

Pending #:

Not Applicable